

September 4, 2003

**Treasury/Postal Appropriations for FY 2004
Statement of Representative Ron Kind**

Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the Flake/McGovern amendment to lift the United States travel ban to Cuba.

Over the past 40 years, our policy of isolation toward Cuba has been an arguable failure. The removal of the totalitarian regime in Cuba has not occurred – even a decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s primary financial sponsor. Positive movements toward political change have not occurred in Cuba over the past 40 years – even as an overwhelming number of former communist regimes have collapsed and embraced democratic principles. These factors beg the question of whether our current policy toward Cuba is the best course of action for the people of the United States and the people of Cuba. At the very least, these factors demand that we reexamine our current policy.

With the free exchange of ideas and words profoundly important in American culture, it seems contradictory that our government would deny its people the opportunity to peaceably spread this concept without unnecessary restrictions. If the central mission of American Foreign policy is to protect Americans and our interests abroad, how does restricting the ability of Americans to travel to Cuba, a nation deemed by the U.S. Department of Defense as not posing a “military threat to the U.S. or to any other countries in the region,” justifiable?

I am concerned that Cuban civilians suffer under government oppression, and it is time to confront the fact that denying direct American tourism to Cuba has resulted in no beneficial change. The island of Cuba is only 90 miles away from the United States and is surrounded by nations that embrace democracy. Positive steps to bring American ideas and words to Cuba are the right course of action, and I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.